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ABSTRACT

"Viewing and Representing in the Middle Years" was a 2-year project to investigate the development of visual literacy in the classrooms of 3 Canadian middle school teachers. These teachers tried a large variety of approaches and were generally optimistic about the increased use of visual materials to make classrooms more inclusive. They also reported some ambivalence about using viewing and representing approaches as part of their curriculum. The investigation reveals some of the complex web of factors that will influence the implementation of an expanded notion of literacy. A list of instructional approaches to visual literacy in language arts at the school is attached. (Contains 31 references.) (Author/RS)

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Visual Literacy across the Middle School Curriculum: A Canadian Perspective

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Viewing and Representing in the Middle Years was a two-year project to investigate the development of visual literacy in the classrooms of three middle school teachers. These teachers tried a large variety of approaches and were generally optimistic about the increased use of visual materials to make classrooms more inclusive. They also reported some ambivalence about using viewing and representing approaches as part of their curriculum. The investigation reveals some of the complex web of factors that will influence the implementation of an expanded notion of literacy.

Visual Literacy across the Middle School Curriculum:
A Canadian Perspective

Educators implementing new English language arts curriculum documents (Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, 1998; Governments of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan and Yukon Territory, 1998; International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English, 1996) know that today's youth have to handle a world which contains multiple forms of literacy (Bean, Bean & Bean, 1999; Berghoff, 1998; New London Group, 1996) not traditionally studied in the classroom. They observe that students are "increasingly able to comprehend the multiply layered visual and verbal information from television or computer screens" (Flood, Heath & Lapp, 1997, p. xv). Teachers are faced with a considerable challenge, however, in implementing visual literacy. They need motivation to make these changes and ways to include this new sign system in their teaching.

The *Viewing and Representing in the Middle Years Project*, described below, examined the instructional approaches and the reflections of three teachers (one each from grades 6, 7 and 8) in a Canadian middle school as they expanded their approaches to English language arts to include viewing and representing approaches as mandated by new curriculum documents: "*Viewing* is an active process of attending to and comprehending visual media such as television, advertising images, films, diagrams, symbols, photographs, videos, drama, drawings, sculpture, and paintings. *Representing* enables students to communicate information and ideas through a variety of media" (Governments of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Northwest Territories,

Saskatchewan and Yukon Territory, 1998, p. 3). Such an expansion of literacy to embrace visual signs would lead to students achieving media literacy -- "an ability to comprehend, use, and control the symbol systems of both print and non-print media, as well as understand the relationship between them" (Cox, 1994, p. 791). My research questions for this study were: In what ways are teachers using visual literacy approaches during their English language arts teaching? What themes emerge from their reflections on the implementation of visual literacy strategies?

New Definitions of Literacy

The theoretical conception of literacy is undergoing a metamorphosis. Where once it meant an ability to read and write, often to some arbitrary level (grade 4 perhaps), society now demands both more sophisticated ability in traditional print text (words on the page) and also the skills of other sign systems such as visuals. During the 1980's, educators became interested in the work of Gardner (1983) on multiple intelligences, Gregorc (1982) on learning styles and Dunn and Dunn (1978) on learning modalities. Each of these researchers suggested that people have differing ways of interacting with the world. Many teachers were eager to reach more students by appealing to, for example, those having "musical intelligence" (Gardner), those who learned in "concrete-sequential" ways (Gregorc), or those who learned best through a "kinesthetic" mode (Dunn & Dunn). Taxonomies of learning styles proliferated however, and teachers began to realize that rather than adapting work to individual students, it was best to provide a variety of learning approaches to all students.

In the 1990's, some researchers began to suggest that including other ways of knowing as equal partners with reading and writing would be beneficial for all students,

"not so much as talents that some may have and others may not have [but] as potentials by which all humans might mean" (Leland & Harste, 1994, p. 339). Educators began to look at other 'sign systems' such as those used in music, art, film which could be analyzed, appreciated, criticized and created by all students in the sign system which is most appropriate. As Rief (1992, p. 164) reminds us: "I need to remember to give my students the opportunities to say things in ways they have 'no words for'".

Literacy now has an expanded definition as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and communicate messages in a variety of forms" (Firestone, 1993 cited in Hobbs, 1997, p. 7). The inclusion of multiple literacies in English language arts teaching and learning calls also for an augmented definition of text as all constructions which form "sets of meanings and signifying practices" (Neilsen, 1998, p. 1). Text types include print (words on a page), oral (speeches) and visual text (pictures) and multimodal texts which combine verbal and visual texts (web sites). If teachers accept the idea that there is, for example, a *language* of film, that a book illustration is a *text*, that a television ad can be *read* by a viewer, then their responsibilities as literacy educators expand accordingly. It would then be their job to develop "the communication potential of all learners through the orchestration and use of multiple ways of knowing for purposes of ongoing interpretation and inquiry into the world" (Leland & Harste, 1994, p. 339).

English language arts teachers would need to improve a student's ability to consider all messages in all media. Such active consideration in viewing and representing would serve to "empower students to discover meaning on their own, thus giving them critical autonomy" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1989, p. 12): the

autonomy to draw their own conclusions about the negative and positive features of all visual and multimodal texts (including those presented to them by the mass media).

Despite the comment of some scholars that "there is not, at the moment, an established theoretical framework within which visual forms of representation can be discussed" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 21), several theoretical traditions provide partial frameworks to guide investigations into visual literacy education. Both arts education (music, movement, art, drama) and mass-media education (newspapers, television) offer teachers ideas for including visual sign systems to increase ways for students to more richly respond to their worlds (Eisner, 1992). New ideas, however, need time to develop. Changing the traditional reading and writing focus of the language arts classroom will not be accomplished without efforts to develop teachers' store of instructional approaches. Sinatra (1986, p. 5) reminds us that "[v]isual literacy is the active reconstruction of past visual experience with incoming visual messages to obtain meaning." It will be achieved only by engaging teachers and students in different approaches to learning.

Increasingly affordable access to information technology has provided new possibilities for developing visual literacy. Technology frequently mediates both the arts and the mass media and may facilitate a more dialogic stance for learners if teachers engage students in a greater variety of communicative arts. Students who can analyze and then undertake the creation of a variety of visual texts, for example, are more likely to take control of their media saturated lives. They begin to participate in the conversation and do not merely have to accept the view of life that is offered to them by news reports, web sites and advertising. Once again, however, scholars note that

scholarship on the uses of technology "for literacy purposes is abysmally weak" (Tyner, 1998, p. 41).

New English language arts curricula

Many English language arts teachers doubt their ability to keep pace with change, to adopt and adapt new approaches, or to balance visual modes of learning with reading and writing. New knowledge and risk-taking attitudes such as giving up some measure of control and certitude are necessary for teachers to help learners experience, understand, and create texts such as cartoons, films, photographs, videotapes, web sites or drum dancing.

Materials and approaches provided in curriculum documents and accompanying government sanctioned workshops set the context for the development of visual literacy in the classroom. Research indicates, however, that curriculum implementation is the most problematic step of instructional change (see for example, Cohen, 1995). The introduction of a new curriculum that mandates viewing and representing across western Canada (Governments of Alberta, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Yukon Territory, 1998) offered me an opportunity to investigate what actually happens in classrooms and what teachers consider when asked to include viewing and representing in the English language arts. The purpose of this study was to institute a long-term project, featuring extended fieldwork, which would serve to describe the expansion of language arts to include a broader view of literacy in three classrooms.

Method

Participants and Setting

The study focused on a newly constituted middle school (grades 5-8) in a new, middle-income suburban area in a mid-size Canadian city. The school division had selected a principal most likely to succeed in overseeing the birth of a new middle school. In turn, she selected a staff through a special application process to ensure that all the teachers of Pickford Middle School (pseudonym) believed in a philosophy of middle-years education as espoused by the National Middle School Association (1995). According to this philosophy, the teachers of Pickford Middle School focused on the needs of the transitional learner, rather than concentrating on subject disciplines as might be evident in a junior-high-school model. A middle-years approach to learning includes the integration of subjects (language arts with social studies, math with science for example). Teachers at Pickford Middle School were teamed in grades 7 and 8. In grades 5 and 6, teachers were responsible for all core subjects. The school also had specialists in art, band, and physical education.

Teacher participants were solicited at a staff meeting and resulted in the following members of the research group:

Sam (all teacher names are pseudonyms). Sam was a grade-eight, language-arts and social studies teacher during the first year of the project. His assignment changed to language arts only in the second year. Sam's students regularly won poetry contests, and he freely admitted that writing was the primary focus of his classroom. Sam had a bachelor's degree in Education and twenty-eight years of experience in teaching. He did frequent poetry workshops with other teachers, worked on the

provincial curriculum development group, and sat on the executive of the provincial English teachers professional association.

Colleen. Colleen was a grade-six teacher in a self-contained classroom. She taught all the core subject areas: language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies to one group of students. She was a first and second year teacher during the project. She also had a year of short, temporary contracts prior to beginning at Pickford Middle School. Colleen had a Bachelor of Education degree and a keen interest in the fine arts.

Dennis. Dennis, a grade seven teacher of language arts and social studies, had been teaching for 20 years, and had a Ph.D. in Educational Foundations. He maintained an active research agenda during his teaching, and presented at conferences. Dennis was particularly interested in using English language arts outcomes to teach social studies content. He frequently served as acting principal. During year two of the project, Dennis was seconded to be the half-time teacher liaison in middle-years education at the university.

Researcher's Role

During the two years of this project, I undertook a number of different roles as I investigated the implementation of viewing and representing in the English Language Arts at Pickford Middle School. As a participant-observer in the school community, I regarded my research as ethnography, recording the classroom events and teacher thoughts but also becoming involved in the life of the school. Since the school was new when I began the project, it was easier than it might otherwise have been to gain access and I became an accepted member of the school community. This was a faculty in

search of an identity, and researching practice quickly became part of what teachers did at Pickford Middle School.

I was, in some ways, just another new face in year one. I began my work as a researcher gathering descriptive data on teachers' practice and concerns in the inclusion of visual literacy. As a professor of language arts methods, I was frequently asked to give advice on implementing the new curriculum. During year two, I met this request by providing books and articles on visual literacy and doing presentations for the staff on research findings. My use of videotaping to record and share lessons and interviews with teachers was imitated by teachers who began to record their own lessons in year two.

Data gathering

I videotaped teachers while doing four lessons of their choice that they believed featured the use of viewing and representing approaches to learning. One lesson was recorded in the fall term and one in the winter term in each of the two years of the project. Teachers also kept weekly written journals of their work with viewing and representing. In addition, I interviewed them at the end of each term on issues which arose in their lessons or in their journals. I also videotaped these interviews. Teachers watched the opening five minutes of their lesson as part of the interview, and then, during their response to questions, often referred to their journals as well. In addition, all teachers had the opportunity to read and modify transcripts of interviews.

I also recorded viewing and representing approaches used in the taped lessons, recorded in the journals, or mentioned during the interviews (see Appendix A for a list).

During year two, students were also interviewed for their reactions to lessons taught with a viewing and/or representing focus.

Data analysis

I handled data analysis as on-going processes during the two years of the project. I transcribed interviews and used transcriptions as the primary source of data. Teachers' journals were a second major source of information as were my own observations. I also asked informants to view/listen to tapes of their teaching and to comment on instructional events during research meetings which were held once per term. Teacher participants at these meetings also reviewed transcripts, and read professional articles on viewing and representing. Their comments during member checks also became part of the data.

I also examined and coded transcripts of the interview tapes, journals and field notes with reference to my research questions. I then reviewed the original data to discover emerging themes and patterns. I refined themes as data collecting and analysis continued (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Huberman & Miles, 1994) in year two. I also drew comparisons between findings from each year of the study.

To ensure trustworthiness of data, I undertook a prolonged engagement at the research site and with my data, used member checks and guarded against bias by reflecting on my research. Nevertheless, it must be noted that I set out on this study believing in the importance of visual literacy. I am also a writer of provincial curriculum documents based on the Western Canadian Protocol (Governments of Alberta, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Yukon Territory, 1998)

and therefore well entrenched in a point of view on viewing and representing. Thus, my "findings constitute a perspective rather than truth..." (Patton, 1990, p. 482).

Findings

During the research study I observed, and teachers reported, many lessons focusing on visual literacy in the English Language Arts classroom. Analysis of these lessons and of comments from Sam, Dennis and Colleen during interviews and in their journals revealed many themes which arose during the experience of helping students to become more visually literate. Perhaps not surprisingly, teachers reported that using viewing and representing in lessons seemed to positively influence student learning and their ability to assess that knowledge. Student comments reinforced that sentiment. However, teachers all reported a number of challenges for themselves in teaching visual literacy such as coping with student attitudes, lack of time, and their own general ambivalence about implementation. Each of these three areas is reviewed in turn. Data in the form of quotations is provided to illustrate each of the themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Overall, comments from Sam, Dennis, and Colleen reveal the complexities of integrating an expanded notion of literacy into the English language arts curriculum.

Viewing and representing approaches

I began the *Viewing and Representing in the Middle Years Project* with the purpose of describing what teachers were including in their lessons to help students develop ability in new ways of knowing. Although I initially intended to discuss with teachers the viewing and representing approaches they were already using, the project inevitably raised teachers' awareness and caused them to attempt more approaches during the project period (twenty weeks spread over two years): "I think just by

becoming involved in this project it's heightened my awareness of the fact that there are these two extra strands [viewing and representing] to the language arts programming and we need to address them." (Dennis)

Some of the approaches reported during the project are clearly *viewing*; that is, analyzing, appreciating, and criticizing visuals such as a lesson by Dennis about looking closely at photographs to determine emotional reactions to news events. Other approaches are obviously *representing* as students are creating visual texts; for example, Sam's class created collages to represent the themes of a novel.

However, often viewing and representing activities are integrated with each other. Just as teachers use writing to teach reading, or listening to strengthen speaking, viewing and representing are frequently taught together. This tendency to integration was markedly greater in year two. Viewing and representing were then often integrated with each other, and also with reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Viewing and representing had also become the focus of many projects that involved two or more subjects, and used input from more than one teacher. For example Sam lead an inquiry project with his math and science teaching partner. It required students to view videotapes, listen to radio programs, read brochures and then create posters or video documentaries (to name a few of many possibilities) to summarize their understanding of a career (for a more detailed discussion of the many viewing and representing approaches used by teachers during this study, see Begoray, in print).

Dennis' classroom. Dennis frequently integrated language arts with social studies in grade 7. His reported and observed approaches were primarily directed to developing viewing ability. Dennis was particularly interested in year one with news reports and was

in fact researching his students' response to the idea of a news cycle (rise and decline of interest in a news event). His traditional emphasis on print text of a news story began to change with the beginning of my research project. His students began to examine newspaper photographs for extra information. In Dennis' classroom, newspaper stories were read with special attention to the effect on the viewer of the accompanying picture: "to help [students] locate details of their stories or issues. . . visuals were able to communicate particularly the emotional aspects of their stories". Students then created collages of the pictures which accompanied two news stories, one on Hurricane Mitch and the other on the founding of Nunavut, and compared the emotional impact (rage and grief, pride and happiness) of the new visual texts.

Techniques Dennis might have used before, such as showing a video clip, now became more purposeful as he considered the necessity of teaching visual literacy:

> Many of the students said 'I would never have had that understanding without seeing the rage of the people and understanding why are they so upset.' It's kind of difficult to do that with a textbook or just, even a newspaper article. Really difficult to do that--to see how disasters and major world events affect people on the street. This was a good example of how a video[taped news report] would do that.

Students in Dennis' class were intensely interested in the reaction of ordinary people to a natural disaster, a response which came alive during the close viewing of a video clip. This viewing activity also led to a collecting of words to describe the scene, and representing by creating word webs, a combined text using print and visual sign systems.

During year two, Dennis' research interests turned to Socratic seminars and he began to investigate the use of videotape to evaluate student participation. He also used the tapes as a record of a learning activity for student's use in self-assessment. Dennis' interest in news events continued with the examination of the visual language of editorial cartoons such as representations of bombs used as bars on a graph to comment on war in the Middle East. This lesson led to a more focused look at all kinds of graphs, how they are used to represent information and how they can be abused (for example, to make a small change look very large on a line graph by using wide spaces between numbers on the y-axis).

Colleen's classroom. Colleen was a first and second year teacher during the project. She emphasized representing activities in her approach to developing visual literacy. She had already created a room filled with pictures, posters, models, and costumes when her involvement in this study began. Much of it was student work, some was commercial, and others she had created herself. Her students did elaborate art and drama projects as part of their day-to-day lessons. Colleen was a very enthusiastic research participant in both years. During year one, she was eager to gather more ideas and frequently asked me for suggestions, reactions to her lessons, copies of articles and books on visual literacy. She loved drawing especially and began immediately to demonstrate its use during taped lessons when I introduced the project. She was very pleased with her grade 6 students' response to representing:

> After [reading] about the first 50 pages, I noticed many students looking around the room, playing in their desks, and even sleeping! Many students were lost...I began the novel all over. This time I asked them to picture what was

happening in their heads, to make a movie and picture the scenes...the students sketched away as I read...they didn't want me to stop reading.

Such early forays into representing lead quickly to a series of lessons on cartooning which included students looking carefully at models, creating an original cartoon character and then a story summarized in a cartoon strip.

By year two, Colleen was more self-confident. She sought out colleagues such as Sam to learn more about book illustrations but also teamed with the physical education teacher to help her students learn how to create games. They used their new knowledge in small groups to write rules and demonstrate their understanding of the movement of Loyalists from the United States to Canada using a variety of gym equipment (bean bags, field markers, hoops). Colleen's students reported positive affective and aesthetic responses to information, and higher order thinking skills (especially synthesis/creativity) during the game. One student commented "I think that doing a game is better [than copying notes or reading], because you have to make it up, so you obviously have to know more things about this topic to be able to make up a game", while another added "This way [by creating a game] we can actually like get involved in what other people think about how the Loyalists and Patriots traveled."

Sam's classroom. Sam was an eager participant in year one of the research study. Over the two years of the project, his classroom featured a balance of viewing and representing approaches. I had heard about Sam even before we met because of his students' remarkable performance in poetry, winning provincial writing contests year after year. We eventually met during a curriculum-writing project and later served together on a provincial teachers' association of English teachers. Sam had taken the

ideas of Atwell (1998) to heart and had implemented writing and reading workshops fully in his classroom. He visited Atwell's classroom in New York and always returned full of new ideas for helping his students to grow as writers.

During that first year, I watched small groups of his grade 8 students create elaborate visuals on large sheets of rectangular paper. Each group had read and written on a different novel. They created plot lines around the four sides of the sheet creating a series of pictures. The middle of the page they filled with pictures and words from magazines to illustrate the novel's themes. Sam and a student teacher worked in turn with each group on planning and drafting, revising ideas, evaluating, selecting, and placing images.

During year two, Sam embarked on a series of reading and writing lessons on imagery and also decided to try to involve all the grade 8 students at Pickford Middle School in a career inquiry project. He had saved videotapes created by previous classes when he had conducted the inquiry as an English language arts project and used these as exemplars to show students what was possible. The production values of the model videos were very high -- costumes, editing, quick cuts and fades -- capturing his students' attention and demonstrating the quality he was asking for in their own projects.

The number of viewing and representing approaches reported in all classrooms shows that teachers had many ideas for addressing visual literacy. Teachers were eager to try a wide variety of activities during the project and indeed there was almost no overlap among approaches reported or observed in year two with those reported or observed in year one. There seems little doubt that the project and the regular presence

of a university researcher interested in visual literacy had an impact on the numbers of approaches tried by teachers.

Viewing activities in classrooms most often featured analysis (looking at details). Appreciation (recognizing quality and/or significance) and criticism (evaluation), although specifically called for in language arts curriculum documents was rare. Students did occasionally evaluate their own work or the work of classmates. Only once, in Dennis' room, were students asked to critique the work of a professional when he asked them: "What goes on in photographers' minds when they go to set up a shot? They have to decide, I would imagine, ahead of time, what their focus is. Is it on the emotional side of the story or is it to communicate a wider message?"

Benefits of Viewing and Representing Approaches

Viewing and representing approaches stimulate learning. "I can listen to him for a while, but then I'm sort of doodling and stuff, because it just doesn't keep my attention" (grade 8 student commenting on a lesson taught with lecture). Both teachers and students at Pickford Middle School reported more learner attention during lessons that featured viewing and representing, often resulting in greater immediate understanding. Approaches such as those discussed above in Colleen's room during the Loyalist game seemed to be especially well suited to these young adolescent learners' needs, and overall invited a greater variety of learners to participate in classroom learning. Colleen realized that her students had diverse talents: "If they are able to act out the concept 'point of view' this would demonstrate they understand. Some students may not be able to express this in their writing so it give them an opportunity to express in a different

form." Middle years students are still making the transition to thinking in abstract rather than concrete ways, and creating visual representations seemed to enhance learning.

Representations offer clear evidence of learning to aid assessment. Visual products reveal whether or not students understand concepts. However, learning or the lack thereof is obvious not only to teachers but also to the learners (perhaps painfully so). Instances of video recording by teachers and students as part of teaching and learning projects were reported much more widely during year two. The teachers in the project began to make much more extensive use of videotape in their own classrooms to archive moments for further analysis. Colleen used her tapes to analyze her teaching performance in much the same way as she had been recorded as a student teacher. All three of the teachers used videotaping to record student work for sharing with future classes. Dennis used videotape to record student performances to assess their level of performance during Socratic seminars and as an instructional aid:

> It is clear to me that the use of videotape will not only allow me to evaluate each student more accurately because I'll be able to re-visit the seminar a number of times, but it will also allow me to use each seminar as a "teaching tool" for the next [seminar].

however, he wondered later about its use by students for their own self-assessment:

> My only reservation relates to the weaker students. Seeing themselves perform ineffectively can't be great for their self-esteem. However, I think seeing the contrast between their performance and the performance of stronger students should make it easier for these students to see where, specifically, they need to improve.

Continuing challenges in implementing visual literacy

This study's findings indicate continuing challenges for those seeking to encourage and implement viewing and representing in the English language arts.

Viewing and representing approaches are often undervalued or misunderstood. The use of visuals during class time is sometimes seen by middle-years students as an opportunity to escape from work. "There's a few of them, I know that they're not focusing on the point of view of the story. They're just so excited about the play that they're overlooking what the main lesson was about." (Colleen)

Alternatively, students can become overly focused on visual representations as only artistic products that must look nice rather than as ways to investigate or represent learning. However, teachers were already beginning to convince students that, for example, models and posters were not just for the artistically gifted: "They're really beginning to see how what they represent has to go in depth in terms of representing their learning, not just be pretty". (Sam)

Viewing and representing approaches require more time to prepare and deliver. As with any new approach, the extensive integration of visuals requires teachers to do more investigation and experimentation. Whether it is simply the newness of these ideas, which is a passing difficulty, or whether viewing and representing approaches will always be more time consuming remains a question. The crucial point for teachers was the cost-benefit analysis: "I have to be more strategic in planning to include viewing and representing, unlike reading and writing where I know from experience what activity would work best in a given situation". (Sam)

The use of viewing and representing approaches in the classroom were influenced by teachers' prior experience, which was often minimal especially during year one. Comparing the reactions of Colleen and Sam to the idea of art as a way to respond to literature indicates that prior experience and attitudes vary widely. Colleen reported during an interview:

> I love drawing. I do a lot of watercolour painting. I've done tons of sketching charcoal and pastel...I don't see it as something you have to learn. It's something that we already know and it's just drawing it out of a person... (Colleen)

Sam admitted "It's not my preferred mode. I can't draw a stickman...". Dennis realized that today's middle-years students are growing up in a different world than he and his colleagues: "Overall, these kids are light years ahead of where we were at that age. They realize that there ARE other ways of communicating ideas besides through reading and writing...". These attitudes seemed to have an impact on whether they were willing to be persuaded by the benefits or challenges of implementing new approaches.

My presence for two years as a researcher interested in visual literacy who used visual research techniques in my own research encouraged viewing and representing approaches at Pickford Middle School. Building on a background of research team relationships, sharing, trying and discussing ideas, year two saw evidence of growth in the use of visual literacy approaches from year one.

Year two, for example, marked the first three-teacher subject integration project in which students were asked to investigate careers and represent their learning in a number of creative ways. Colleen still used the expertise of others to help her to teach

visual literacy (for example Sam demonstrated a lesson on examining picture book illustrations) but also became as an equal partner in a social studies, language arts, physical education project (the Loyalist game). Dennis developed and taught a series of writing lessons using a slide show and band performance on Remembrance Day developed by the art and music teachers.

Teachers were also becoming more critical of approaches to teaching visual literacy. Dennis acknowledged that viewing videotapes helped both him and his students to assess their work but later suggested that the use of such evidence must be carefully considered as it can prove threatening to those recorded:

> The dynamics of the seminar were generally dominated by a small number of verbal boys...although initially I saw the use of video as an effective teaching tool, I wonder now if it might be discouraging rather than encouraging these girls...is the use of video accentuating the power differences that already exist in the classroom?

He gave students more choice in their own representing work and allowed them to discover that visuals are frequently more difficult to create than might be anticipated. Students discovered for example that videotapes were challenging to produce while overhead transparencies could be easily created (and might be more appropriate for some representations of knowledge).

Colleen, in year two, discovered that she could be both creative and critical of viewing and representing approaches, whereas in year one she was mostly anxious to gather ideas which she could use directly in her own classroom. Sam, who began the project enthusiastically as one who integrated viewing and representing into language

arts and social studies in year one, became much more ambivalent in year two. He reported that his teaching assignment, which had changed to language arts alone, did not encourage him to use of viewing and representing (despite its presence in language arts curriculum documents). Ironically, observations of his teaching showed that he was emphasizing visualization as a way to improve student reading comprehension and writing ability. Sam did not see these approaches as viewing and representing until his interview in the middle of year two:

> [Visualization techniques] really helped my weaker readers learn to conceptualize, learn to see pictures in their mind as they read. I never thought of it as a viewing and representing sort of thing. Adept readers do that naturally, and they don't even realize that those pictures happen in their heads when they read, but weaker readers tend not to have anything happening -- they feel the meaning is all embedded in the text.

By the end of year two, Sam was leading a multi-disciplinary project across grade 8 which featured viewing and representing activities. He reported that he had a picture of himself as a teacher of visual literacy "being dragged along, but with a big grin on my face".

Discussion

Current shifts to a more postmodern literacy which includes print, oral, and visual texts and multiple perspectives contribute to a climate favourable for re-considering traditional approaches but also challenge the status quo in many language arts classrooms. Bridging the gap between new ideas and practical implementation is the next step. Eisner (1994, p. 89), a long term advocate for the diversification of meaning

making opportunities in the classroom, comments that "[r]econceptualization, although it is a necessary condition, is not enough" -- we need to put those ideas into operation. Not only students need opportunities to view and represent however. Teachers also need to have opportunities to build their own visual literacy by participating in research supported, when possible, by other professionals. When teachers' traditional approaches to language arts teaching are challenged, as Sam's ideas were, teachers need to find ways to build on their prior knowledge of more established approaches to literacy.

The inclusion of visual literacy in the language arts classroom is also a democratic enterprise. Viewing and representing assists those students who struggle with linguistic 'ways of knowing' to say what they mean. All learners, however, no matter what their propensities, need to develop their potential to represent their understanding of ideas in a variety of ways. Some concepts are better understood or represented through one sign system than another. In offering students more opportunities to participate in a variety of communicative arts, we offer them as well chances to say more.

While it had the benefit of long-term involvement with a staff, the project also investigated the visual literacy approaches only within a single school, one that has a relatively homogenous student population. Some of these students, however, proved to be particularly eloquent about their support for such approaches:

> I find it – it like grabs people's attention. If I look around the class when our teacher's just standing up there talking about a whole lesson, a lot of people are just like – their heads are down on their desk or they have wandering eyes. But

when I watched during the visual representing we did, a lot of people were looking and really paying attention to what was happening. (grade 8 student)

This study should be repeated at schools with a broader multicultural and economic background as well and with different age groups. Second, the teachers in this study were few in numbers and were volunteers drawn from a handpicked staff. More investigations with more teachers and students need to be completed.

Implications for Teacher Education

Teacher education and curriculum support documents offer in-service and pre-service teachers assistance with methods, such as suggestions for viewing and representing, so that they might continue to improve their teaching. The presence of on site advice and demonstrations (such as that which I provided at Pickford) would also be helpful in the building of necessary knowledge and skills. Working with teachers' ambivalent attitudes and lack of experiences with visual sign systems, I believe, will continue to be a challenge.

Sam, for example, had previously experienced tremendous success in basing his language-arts program squarely on the development of reading and writing according to approaches made popular by Atwell (1998). Despite volunteering for the viewing and representing project and personal acquaintance with me, his professional self-image was significantly challenged by new ideas. Of great interest was Sam's persistence in the face of less than salutary experiences with visual approaches in his past and his ambivalence perhaps resulting from these experiences. Sam was, nevertheless, an active teacher of visual literacy. His use of guided imagery during reading workshops points to the possibility that viewing and representing may best be connected to more

traditional areas of expertise for experienced teachers to adopt their use. On the other hand, Colleen had more experience with the arts. Her challenge was to discover ways to introduce her knowledge to her students in language arts contexts. David adopted a researcher's attitude to his teaching. His approach was to introduce new ideas and then reflect systematically on his students' responses to them. All three teachers, nevertheless, discovered ways to integrate visual literacy into their language arts curriculum.

As noted above, viewing activities during this project tended to stress analysis and rarely introduced appreciation and criticism of professional work. In the same way we teach students to discuss the significance and quality of literary works, we might also encourage a critical stance towards visual representations. Arts specialists can certainly begin to help their colleagues in the regular classroom to undertake this challenge. Film criticism and the assessment of mass media can also be used in the classroom. The alternative is to raise this generation of students to believe that if a film, cartoon or web site, for example, has been made public it must be good and truthful – or, on the other hand to imply that all visuals are manipulative and evil. Just as we know that not everything in print can be believed and that opinions vary in our evaluation of novels, editorials and technical manuals, so there are discussions regarding quality surrounding all manner of visual representations.

Final Words

The viewing and representing project at Pickford Middle School was clearly only a beginning in understanding the teaching of visual literacy – we see through the class "darkly", making only tentative conclusions. The establishment of long-term research

projects such as *Viewing and Representing in the Middle Years* makes possible the development of collaborative relationships to effect significant gains in understanding for both teachers and university-based researchers on new approaches to English language arts. Visual literacy, it seems, will only become established in language arts classrooms once both teachers and students have opportunities to adopt new strategies and attitudes. Only by building a store of background experiences can expanded theoretical notions of literacy become classroom realities.

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Instructional approaches to visual literacy in language arts at Pickford Middle School:

(Year One)

Viewing

- Analyzing elements of fiction in a film
- Predicting future events in a film
- Viewing historic artifacts and predicting their use
- Analyzing how picture book illustrations contribute to mood, theme, plot
- Using photographs to generate vocabulary
- Reporting current events accompanied by photograph
- Analyzing videos using anticipation guides
- Viewing samples of former students' visual projects
- Analyzing analogy, caricature, bias, style and accessibility, and cartoonist as social commentator in political cartoons
- Analyzing newspaper photographs as constructions
- Analyzing information and emotion portrayed in television newscasts
- Analyzing information on news agencies' web sites

Representing

- Performing skits to demonstrate change in point of view
- Re-telling stories by drawing a series of illustrations
- Assembling collages on themes of novels
- Performing tableaus of literary events
- Creating models of aboriginal life before first contact

Both

- Analyzing humour techniques in cartoons, creating cartoon characters and comic strips
- Analyzing and creating print advertisements for school magazine using publishing software and scanner
- Creating and analyzing collages of newspaper photographs
- Constructing collages of newspaper headlines

(Year Two)

Viewing

- Discussing and comparing visual images imagined during reading
- Viewing slide show
- Imagining while listening to songs
- Analyzing videos of student seminars
- Analyzing videos with concept organizer
- Analyzing Political cartoons for symbols, analogies
- Analyzing web sites for information
- Comparing strengths and weaknesses of visual presentation types: overhead, posters, videotape, PowerPoint

Representing

- Creating documentary and narrative videos to report results of inquiry projects
- Painting characters and events from favourite books
- Sketching to respond to teacher's oral reading
- Drawing rooms imagined for literary characters

Creating storyboards to plan video
Note-taking by sketching
Synthesizing literary descriptions of individual sites into town maps
Creating life size props for skits of historic events
Creating drums with personal symbols
Creating a promotional video
Inventing outdoor games to show understanding of historic events
Creating electronic spreadsheets to represent data from research

Both

Analyzing and creating picture books
Analyzing graphs from newspapers for choice of graphing type and creating graphs to represent information

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